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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABIDJAN 000045

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SUBJECT: ELECTORAL PROCESS GRINDING TO A HALT

REF: 10 ABIDJAN 37; 10 ABIDJAN 41

CLASSIFIED BY: Tanya Salseth, Political Officer, Department of State,  
Embassy Abidjan; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Since the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) fraud scandal made headlines in early January, the pace of electoral preparations has slowed to a crawl. There is still no consensus among the political parties on a way forward following the CEI scandal. The 70 observation committees tasked with overseeing the scrubbing of the provisional electoral list are reviewing very few cases. Persistent discussion about reopening the dispute process continues, and the opposition - emboldened, perhaps, by the strong turnout at its peaceful January 26 demonstration - is now calling for the Minister of Interior to resign. END SUMMARY

#### POLITICAL PARTIES DIG IN DEEPER

12. (C) Political parties remain at an impasse on how the CEI fraud scandal should be resolved. FPI Director of Political Affairs Navigue Konate pointedly told Poloff that "if we lose the presidential election and President Mambe is still head of the CEI, we will never accept the results." Militant youth leader Charles Ble Goude, who called off a planned demonstration to demand Mambe's resignation, told the press that his supporters still intend to march. For its part, the RHDP opposition coalition unequivocally supports Mambe and says it will continue to do so unless a neutral investigation shows he is at fault. Konate, however, told Poloff that the FPI is against a UN-led investigation, as it would "take too long" and UNOCI SRSG Choi "favors Mambe." Recently, the Forum of Religious Confessions, a coalition of Islamic and Catholic leaders, has stepped in to help mediate the political party standoff; however, little progress has been made.

#### OBSERVATION COMMITTEES LIMPING ALONG

13. (C) On January 27, the Prime Minister's office stated that 95% of the 70 observation committees tasked with examining cases submitted during the dispute process are in place. Discussions with INS and ONI representatives on January 28 confirm this figure; however, both reps told Poloff that the case review process is proceeding excruciatingly slowly. INS Special Advisor Dalo Yao told Poloff that the 70 committees had a 16 day window from January 18 to February 2 to review cases from the list of 1.033 million "unverified" names. As of January 28, however, the committees had only examined a little over 10% of the cases: approximately 115,000 cases have been approved and 8,000 rejected. Reps attribute these low numbers to the reluctance of some local CEIs to forward cases to the committees. It is unclear whether courts are continuing to review contested cases submitted according to the original timeline for the contestation period and which should have been completed by January 17. Reports indicate that not all had been finished by that deadline, and that new cases

could be referred to the courts by the new observation committees. Both INS and ONI reps believed the dispute process would likely be reopened for ten days, and agents staffing the observation committees would need to extend their contracts due to delays.

#### THE OPPOSITION FINDS ITS VOICE

¶4. (SBU) The January 26 RHDP demonstration (see ref A) drew thousands of peaceful, disciplined marchers. Agence France Presse reported 3,000 marchers present; the UN, 5,000. [Note: Numerous photos of the demonstration currently available at [http://news.abidjan.net/photos/photo.asp?id=4\\_0486](http://news.abidjan.net/photos/photo.asp?id=4_0486) End Note]. There is evidence that the marchers' complaints of unequal media access are justified: a December 2009 civil society report conducted in conjunction with the CNCA (Cote d'Ivoire's national media regulatory body) concluded that Ivoirian national television routinely covers more FPI-related news.

¶5. (SBU) The demonstration was perhaps more important, however, for its unspoken message. Ivoirians still vividly remember the last major opposition protest in March 2004, when government security forces launched a violent crackdown that killed upwards of 120 people over several days of bloodshed. Nearly six years later, the January 26 demonstration served as a stark contrast: the opposition worked hand in hand with defense and

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security forces to ensure the protest was conducted in a peaceful and orderly manner, and the ruling party not only authorized the demonstration to take place, but also kept its more militant supporters in check.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Even if the demonstration results in few changes, the protest is a testament to Cote d'Ivoire's political progress. The success of the demonstration also seems to have given the opposition renewed self-confidence and a stronger sense of unity. The day after the demonstration, the RHDP coalition called for the Minister of Interior's resignation, citing his January 19 letter (later rescinded) instructing prefects to take over the dispute process from the CEI (ref B). They are also irritated at the Interior Ministry's investigation into the fraud scandal. Until the scandal is resolved, however, and a clear way forward on re-validating the voters' list determined, elections are likely to be further delayed.

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